

Lake Ontario comes back: partnership brings environmental progress

The environmental quality of Lake Ontario is being protected through collaboration between governments and the private sector in a long-term, international lakewide management plan as well as individual remedial action plans.

Lake Ontario has been the scene of long-term partnership work by governments, industry and local groups to restore and protect environmental quality. Scientific studies show that the work is paying off.

In a time of rapid economic growth, the environmental quality of Lake Ontario has continued to improve and is better today than it has been in decades.

The improvement is the result of collaboration by the Province of Ontario, the governments of Canada and the United States, industries and communities in activities that range from increased pollution control through lakewide management plans (LaMPs) to the cleanup of individual areas of concern under remedial action plans (RAPs).

Markers of progress

Recent indicators of progress in Lake Ontario's comeback include:

- The reappearance of species of fish such as lake sturgeon, lake herring and deep-water sculpin – the sculpin were once so scarce they were feared to be extinct in Lake Ontario.
- The increase, since the 1980s, of bald eagle nesting territories in the Lake Ontario basin at a rate of about 20 per cent a year.
- A decline in bacterial contamination from the highs of the 1960s and 1970s, with beaches are staying open longer in the summer, as a result of improved sewage treatment and other cleanup action by the provincial, federal and municipal governments.
- The numerous species, including green frogs, Midland painted turtles, wood ducks, muskrats, green herons, great blue herons and kingfishers, attracted to the newly-created habitat at Toronto's Tommy Thompson Park.
- Sightings of 64 species of birds breeding at Oshawa Second Marsh, including the yellow billed cuckoo, northern harrier and American bittern — species that had not been seen at the marsh for years.
- Recovery of the hard-hit Hamilton Harbour to the point that aquatic life is regenerating and, in some areas, the harbour is safe to swim in. Positive markers include the recovery of 200 hectares of wetland in the harbour and an increase in the number of fish species from four to 16. And, after an absence of 50 years, wild celery is growing again in the Cootes Paradise part of the harbour.
- Removal by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Environment Canada and other partners of 10,500 cubic metres of contaminated sediments from the Welland River, which flows to the Niagara River leading to Lake Ontario
- Dramatic improvement in water quality in the Niagara River, Lake Ontario's largest tributary, as a result of sustained pollution cleanup and prevention efforts by four partner governments, Ontario, Canada,

the United States and New York State.

Scientific analyses of water quality, studies of contaminant levels in fish and shellfish and tests of river sediments confirm the improvements, which include declines of 50 per cent or more overall in critical pollutants and more than 98 per cent on the Canadian side.

- An increase in populations of birds that nest in colonies, as revealed in a recent Lake Ontario-wide census by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Canadian Wildlife Service and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.
- Steep declines in the volume of phosphorus and sediment entering Lake Ontario tributaries. This includes the elimination, since 1994, of 9,600 kilograms of phosphorus and 6,000 kilograms of sediment that had been entering the Bay of Quinte watershed. This feat has been achieved through a major upgrading of sewage plants at Belleville, Quinte West (Trenton and Frankford), Prince Edward (Picton), and Warkworth as well as by other remedial actions in the watershed.

Note:

Further information is available in Environment Canada's *Third Report of Progress Under the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem 1997-1999* at the Web site <http://www.cciw.ca/green-lane/coa/third-progress-report/intro.html>.

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